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ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for improving students' writing skills in the areas of mechanics and organization through the implementation of a Writer's Workshop. The targeted population consists of fourth and fifth grade students in a Midwestern community located outside of a major city. Evidence for the existence of this problem is shown through teacher evaluation and student self-evaluation checklists, teacher developed rubrics, and teacher-student conferences of writing samples. Analysis of probable cause data revealed in literature indicate: the lack of teacher training in the teaching of writing, the lack of time devoted to the implementation of formal writing, and the reliance of previous teachers' ineffective strategies utilized in the teaching of writing. Motivation was also apparent as a probable cause in the literature. A review of solution strategies in the literature revealed that components of Writer's Workshop were helpful in improving students' mechanics and organization in writing. The Writer's Workshop approach encompasses a variety of mini-lessons including punctuation, capitalization, sentence structure, word choice, supporting details, transitions, and editing, to develop and improve mechanics and organization of student writing. All of these and other components of Writer's Workshop will be implemented in this study. Post intervention data indicated an increase in the correct use of mechanical and organizational writing skills by the targeted fourth and fifth grade students. Through the post self writing reflection, students also demonstrated an internalized satisfaction towards their writing. Contains 37 references, and 4 tables and 8 figures of data. Appendixes contain checklists, writing prompts, rubrics, self reflection for students, and a letter to parents. (Author/RS)

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IMPROVING INADEQUATE WRITERS

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ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for improving students' writing skills in the areas of mechanics and organization through the implementation of a Writer's Workshop. The targeted population consists of fourth and fifth grade students in a mid-western community located outside of a major city. Evidence for the existence of this problem is shown through teacher evaluation and student self-evaluation checklists, teacher developed rubrics, and teacher-student conferences of writing samples.

Analysis of probable cause data revealed in literature indicate: the lack of teacher training in the teaching of writing, the lack of time devoted to the implementation of formal writing, and the reliance of previous teachers' ineffective strategies utilized in the teaching of writing. Motivation was also apparent as a probable cause in the literature.

A review of solution strategies in the literature revealed that components of Writer's Workshop were helpful in improving students' mechanics and organization in writing. The Writer's Workshop approach encompasses a variety of mini-lessons including punctuation, capitalization, sentence structure, word choice, supporting details, transitions, and editing, to develop and improve mechanics and organization of student writing. All of these and other components of Writer's Workshop will be implemented in this study.

Post interventions data indicated an increase in the correct use of mechanical and organizational writing skills by the targeted fourth and fifth grade students. Through the post self writing reflection, students also demonstrated an internalized satisfaction towards their writing.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The students of the targeted fourth and fifth grade classes exhibit inadequately developed writing skills in the areas of mechanics and organization, which negatively impact academic performance. Evidence for the existence of the problem is shown through teacher evaluation and student self evaluation checklists, teacher developed rubrics, and teacher-student conferences.

Immediate Problem Context

The school site selected for this study is one of five schools in a public school district in the Midwest. The site is an intermediate school housing fourth and fifth grade students. Two targeted fourth grade classes from the site are referred to as Class A and Class B in this study. Class C refers to the targeted fifth grade classroom also located at this site. The school population consists of 481 students and 30 certified full and part-time staff members. This site has a high concentration of White, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Limited English Proficient (LEP) students in comparison to the state averages. (School Report Card 1998). The racial/ethnic enrollment of students encompasses 60.9% White, 5.3% African American, 15.4% Hispanic, and 18.4% Asian/Pacific Islander. LEP students are eligible for bilingual education and comprise 6.8% of the school population.

Forty-six full and part-time staff members work at the site, including one principal, one assistant principal, two secretaries, 16 intermediate classroom teachers, four special educational teachers, two social workers, one psychologist, five program assistants, two speech therapists, one Spanish bilingual teacher, one English as a second language (ESL) teacher, four special area teachers who focus on math/science or reading/social studies with groups of 19 or less students, one media specialist, one occupational therapist, one nurse, and three custodians. The 16 fourth and fifth grade teachers have an average teaching experience of 15 years or more. Master's degrees have been earned by 2.7% of the classroom teachers. The average teacher salary is $40,296 which is slightly lower than the state average salary of $43,806, however, the average administrator salary at $80,184 is higher than the state administrative salary of $73,423. This site's instructional expenditure per pupil of $3,274 is slightly lower than the state expenditure of $3,747. This site's operating expenditure per pupil is $5,479 which again is lower than the state's expenditure of $6,281.

Fourth and fifth grade classroom teachers are responsible for a comprehensive curricula which includes general programs, modified instructional programs, and inclusion programs. General programs are defined as the basic subject areas of math, science, social studies, reading, language/writing, health, spelling, and handwriting. Modified instructional programs provide alternative teaching strategies to meet the needs of individual students, whereas, inclusion programs incorporate students with an individual education plan in a non-special education classroom for over fifty percent of the day, with the help of an individual aid.

Every fourth and fifth grade student is equipped with a textbook series in all subjects areas except writing. Due to the emphasis on state standards and benchmarks, teachers have developed materials to strengthen the existing curriculum. At this site, the entire writing

curriculum is teacher-developed. In addition, the student population receives weekly instruction from specialized teachers in these areas: 100 minutes of art in the art room or 90 minutes of music in the music room per semester, and 90 minutes of physical education in the gym.

This site opened in 1963 as a kindergarten through fifth grade school. The first addition to expand the school was built in 1965. In 1994, the district reorganized and the school became a fourth and fifth grade intermediate building. In 1997, a one story brick addition consisting of two classrooms and a new library media center was added to the building. The building consists of eight sections of fourth and eight sections of fifth grade. Grades K-3 are housed in two elementary schools located on the north and south ends of town. Grades 6-8 are housed in a middle school located southeast of this site. The average class size is 29 students, which is higher than both the district and the state averages of 20 students per class.(School Report Card 1998).

Class A consists of 13 boys and 16 girls of which 72% are White, 3% are African American, 14% are Asian/Pacific Islander, and 10% are Hispanic. Class A contains one internet accessible computer, one overhead projector, one overhead projector screen, one cassette player, four wall maps, a chalk board, a wall of bulletin boards, and a classroom library with one bean bag chair.

Class B consists of 18 girls and 11 boys of which 66% are White, 24% are Asian/Pacific Islander, and 10% are Hispanic. Class B contains one internet accessible computer, one overhead projector, one overhead projector screen, one CD cassette player, five wall maps, one operational sink, a chalk board, a dry erase board, a wall of bulletin boards, and a classroom library with three bean bag chairs.

Class C consists of 14 girls and 15 boys of which 70% are White, 3% are African American, 10% are Asian/Pacific Islander, and 17% are Hispanic. Class C contains two computers with only one being internet accessible, one overhead projector, one overhead projector screen, a listening center, two wall maps, a chalk board, six bulletin boards, and a classroom library.

Parental support of Classes A, B, and C is offered through a variety of means. The Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) is the site's volunteer program and monetarily supports the site. Individual parents offer support of the school and teachers by volunteering time in the classroom, chaperoning field trips, and organizing activities which includes: book fairs ,a fun fair, monthly market days, monthly skating parties, seasonal fundraisers, weekly scouting programs, and an annual field day. In addition, parents organize and serve hot lunch on a bimonthly basis.

Although individual parents support Classes A, B, and C by volunteering their time for various activities, the overall parental contact with the teacher concerning their child's educational process is less frequent. The parents/or guardians of approximately 90% of the students make only one contact with the student's teacher during the school year, usually at the first scheduled report card conference, showing that parents/guardians take a limited interest in their child's school performance after the first report card.

Surrounding Community

The school's surrounding community is located on the west side of a small city in the Midwest near a major city. This community is growing with a current population of approximately 30,000 which is expected to reach 34,000 by the year 2010. The city has a strong

industrial base with eight industrial parks and room for expansion. The community is primarily middle class comprised of 54.1% white and 45.9% blue collar workers. (Chicago Tribune Homes 1999). Economic indicators show growth in housing, small business, and industry. Seventy-three percent of the homes were built in the last thirty years indicating population growth. Due to the projected population in the upcoming years, new housing developments are in progress. (Community Directory 1998-99).

According to the 1990 census, the average household income is $59,646 and the median home value is $137,604. The racial/ethic population is 69.7% White, 2.7% African American, 8.3% Hispanic, and 19.3% Asian/Pacific Islander. The students' ethnic population at this site and the ethnic population of the community show a resemblance. One middle school, one intermediate school, two elementary schools, and one pre-k school are encompassed in the community school district which has a total K-8 enrollment of 2,124. The district employs 233 individuals of whom 164 are teachers, along with one superintendent, one associate superintendent, and three assistant superintendents. Currently, an overcrowding issue exists in the district due to a population growth, as previously cited from the Chicago Tribune Homes. In 1998, a referendum to add additions to the two elementary schools and the middle school in the district was successfully passed by the voters (Chamber of Commerce, 1998).

National Context of the Problem

The problem of inadequate writing in the classroom has generated concern beyond the local level. The Writing Report Card: Writing Achievement in American Schools, (1986) revealed that fourth grade students have poor writing skills. Two percent of fourth graders wrote adequate or better expository writing, less than 9% wrote well-developed narratives at or above

adequate levels, and only 4% wrote adequate persuasive letters in which they were able to support their point of view.

The 1996 National Assessments of Educational Progress (NAEP) developed by the Education Commission of the States reported that inadequate writing skills exists in grades four, eight, and eleven. Significant changes were observed in fourth grade students' average writing scores from 1984 to 1996. Average writing scores of eighth graders fluctuated, reaching a low point in 1990 and increased again in 1992, however, from 1984 to 1996 no significant difference in students' writing scores were noted. Whereas, an overall pattern of declining performance is evident in the average writing scores of eleventh graders across the assessment years. This data supports that our nations students' writing skills are poor and, in fact, are declining as students ascend in grades.

Unfortunately, a majority of teachers give children insufficient writing instruction. Donald Graves, one of the pioneers who studied how children learn to write in the 1970's states, "There is a definite minority of prepared writing teachers" (Graves, 1995, p. 42). In 1994, Graves investigated 50 major teacher-preparing institutions in the United States and 24 of the states didn't provide a course of writing for a teacher-in-training

In conclusion, an unflattering portrait of American student writers is painted from these studies. Regardless of the causes or related issues, the problem of undeveloped writing skills is a serious concern nationwide.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM EVIDENCE AND PROBABLE CAUSE

Problem Evidence

In order to document the problem of inadequate writing skills, a teacher survey, writing checklists, teacher developed rubrics, and student self writing reflection was used.

The writing checklists (Appendixes A and B) were used by the teacher researchers throughout the twelve week study. Checklists documented deficits and improvements of targeted mechanical and organizational skills. At the end of the study, each researcher utilized the checklists to compile a class record of the number of errors found in the pre-test verses the post-test.

The pre-test writing prompts for narrative and persuasive writing (Appendixes C and D) were administered during the first week of school. The results were tallied using the writing checklists. The mechanical checklist identified errors in the areas of capitalization, punctuation, spelling, grammar, and word choice. The organizational checklist identified whether an introduction, supporting details, transitional words, a conclusion, and indentions were used in students' writing.

Figure 1 shows the results of the mechanical checklist error tallies for the narrative pre-writing prompt. Class A results revealed 59 capitalization errors, 55 punctuation errors, 150 spelling errors, 54 grammatical errors, and 37 word choice errors.

Class B exhibited 79 capitalization errors, 52 punctuation errors, 140 spelling errors, 46 grammatical errors, and 29 word choice errors. Class C exposed 101 capitalization errors, 101 punctuation errors, 192 spelling errors, 35 grammatical errors, and 72 word choice errors.

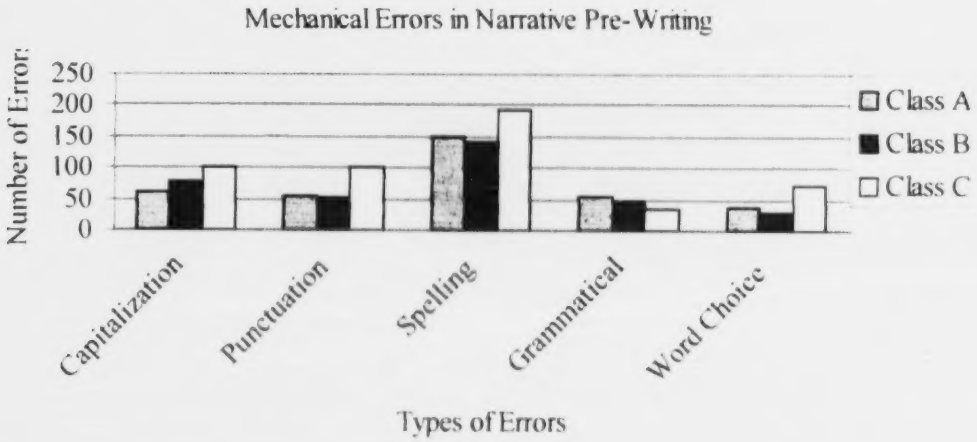


Figure 1. Types and number of student mechanical errors tallied from the narrative pre-writing prompt for the targeted classes during the first semester of the 1999-2000 school year.

Figure 2 shows the results of the mechanical checklist error tallies for the persuasive pre-writing prompt. Class A results revealed 41 capitalization errors, 45 punctuation errors, 142 spelling errors, 28 grammatical errors, and 46 word choice errors. Class B exhibited 74 capitalization errors, 40 punctuation errors, 156 spelling errors, 28 grammatical errors, and 47 word choice errors. Class C exposed 65 capitalization errors, 47 punctuation errors, 170 spelling errors, 60 grammatical errors, and 62 word choice errors.

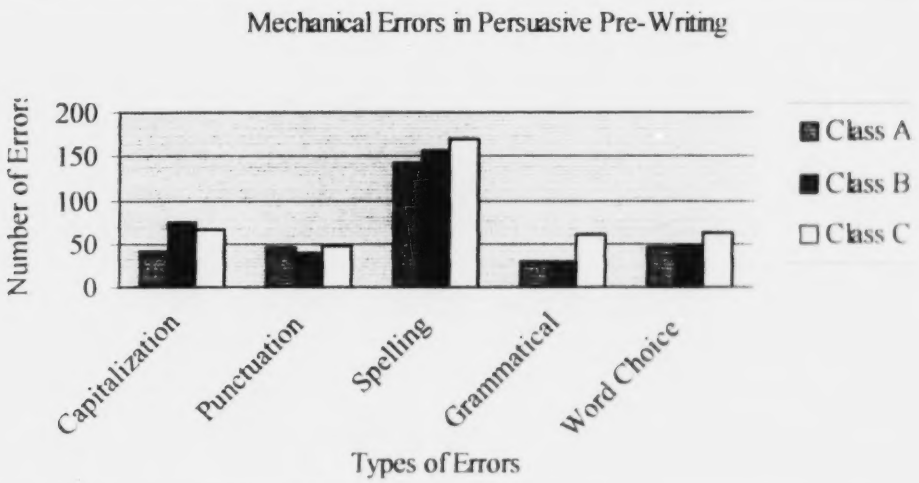


Figure 2. Types and number of student mechanical errors tallied from the persuasive pre-writing prompt for the targeted classes during the first semester of the 1999-2000 school year.

Figure 3 shows the results of the use or non-use of organizational skills for the narrative pre-writing prompt. In Class A, 25 students included an introduction and three students had no written introduction. Nineteen students supported their writing with details. Transitional words were used by 16 students. Seven students included a conclusion and 21 students had no written conclusion. Seven students indented paragraphs within their writing, whereas 21 students did not. In Class B, 16 students included an introduction and 13 students had no written introduction. Sixteen students supported their writing with details. Transitional words were used by 14 students. Eight students included a conclusion and 21 students had no written conclusion. Fifteen students indented paragraphs within their writing, whereas 14 students did not indent. In Class C, 21 students included an introduction and eight students had no written introduction. Twenty-seven students supported their writing with details. Transitional

words were used by 19 students. Twenty-two students included a conclusion and seven students had no conclusion. Twenty students indented paragraphs within their writing, whereas nine students did not indent.

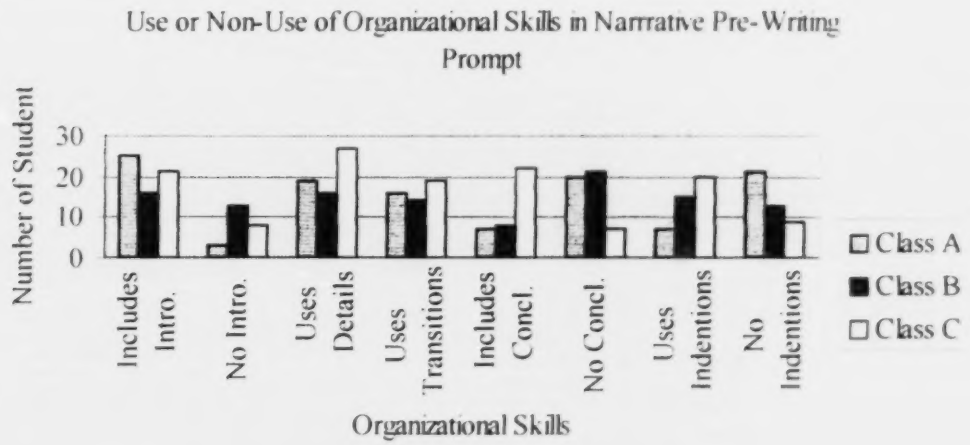


Figure 3. The use and non-use of organizational skills from the narrative pre-writing prompt for the targeted classes during the first semester of the 1999-2000 school year.

Figure 4 depicts the results of the use or non-use of organizational skills for the persuasive pre-writing prompt. In Class A, 26 students included an introduction and two students had no written introduction. Nine students supported their writing with details. Transitional words were used by 15 students. Fifteen students included a conclusion and 13 students had no written conclusion. Fourteen students indented paragraphs within their writing, whereas 14 students did not indent. In Class B, 17 students included an introduction and 12 students had no written introduction. Nine students supported their writing with details. Transitional words were used by 17 students. Eleven students included a conclusion and 17 students had no written conclusion. Fifteen students indented paragraphs within their writing, whereas 15 students did not indent. In Class C,

24 students included an introduction and five students had no written introduction. Twenty-four students supported their writing with details. Transitional words were used by 18 students. Twenty students included a conclusion and nine students had no conclusion. Twenty-one students indented paragraphs within their writing, whereas eight students did not indent when beginning a new paragraph.

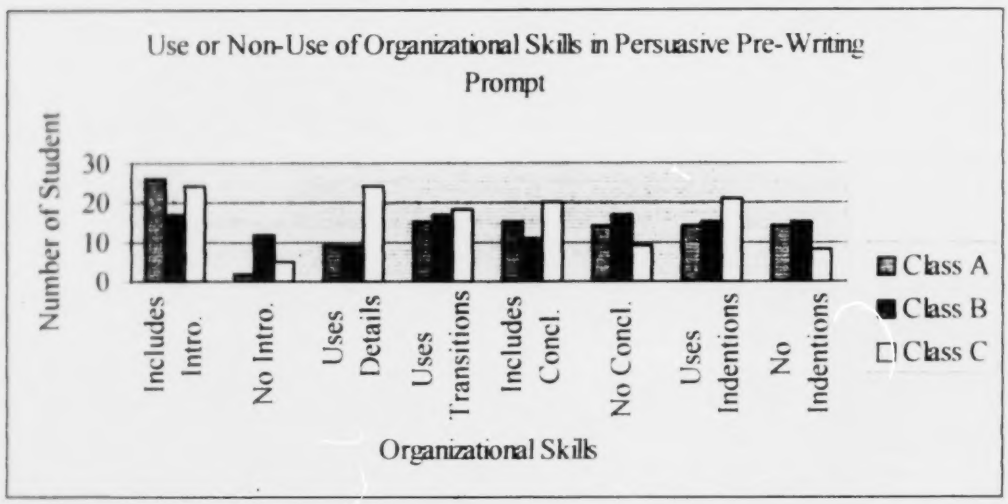


Figure 4. The use and non-use of organizational skills from the persuasive pre-writing prompt for the targeted classes during the first semester of the 1999-2000 school year.

Writing skills were also assessed through the use of narrative and persuasive writing rubrics (Appendixes E and F). The rubrics analyzed style and language, focus, support, organization, and conventions of student writing. The levels of proficiency are indicated using three categories: Exceeds (E), Meets (M), and Does Not Meet (DNM). Table 1 shows the results of the number of students scoring within each of the three categories on the narrative pre-writing prompt. In Class A, zero students fell within the exceeds category, 23 students meet, and five students did not meet. In Class B, zero students fell within the exceeds category, 17 students meet, and 12 students did not meet.

In Class C, zero students fell within the exceeds category, 21 students meet, and eight students did not meet.

Table 1

Narrative Writing Rubric Results for Pre-Writing Prompt

Category	Class A	Class B	Class C
Exceeds	0	0	0
Meets	24	17	21
Does Not Meet	5	12	8

Table 2 shows the results of the number of students scoring within each of the three categories on the persuasive pre-writing prompt. In Class A, zero students fell within the exceeds category, 19 students meet, and nine students did not meet. In Class B, zero students fell within the exceeds category, 11 students meet, and 19 students did not meet. In Class C, zero students fell within the exceeds category, 21 students meet, and eight students did not meet.

Table 2

Persuasive Writing Rubric Results for Pre-Writing Prompt

Category	Class A	Class B	Class C
Exceeds	0	0	0
Meets	19	11	21
Does Not Meet	9	19	8

Students engaged in reflective thinking about their writing twice during the twelve week study. (Appendix G). Students were asked to internalize their writing experience through completing a self-reflection following the narrative and persuasive

writing prompts. Students' responses were placed into two main categories: an area of writing that students felt comfortable with and an area where students felt there was a need for improvement.

In Class A, 54% of the students felt internally satisfied with their writing. Thirty-two percent of the students felt their handwriting had improved from previous years. Seven percent of the students were pleased with their usage of supporting details, and 8% felt that they had utilized spelling concepts taught in earlier grades. In Class B, 55% of the students were internally satisfied with their writing, and 7% were internally dissatisfied. Twenty-one percent didn't specify what they were satisfied with regards to their writing, 3% were proud of their handwriting, and 14% expressed feelings towards subjects that were unrelated to writing. In Class C, 38% of the students were internally satisfied about their writing, whereas 24% were internally unsatisfied. Seven percent of the students were proud of their spelling skills, 6% didn't specify what they were particularly satisfied with, and 10% were satisfied with skills unrelated to writing.

Student responses regarding their feelings towards improving their writing skills varied. In Class A, 36% of the students felt they needed to improve their spelling, 29% wanted to improve their handwriting, 18% wanted to increase the use of supporting details, 7% felt they needed to stay focused on their topic, 7% wanted to find topics that interested them, and 4% needed to clarify their ideas. In Class B, 3% of the students felt they needed to create an original introduction and conclusion, 3% wanted to work on grammatical errors, 17% wanted to improve their handwriting, 3% wanted to increase the use of supporting details, 10% didn't specify the improvement they needed, and 41% included a response that was unrelated to writing. In Class C, 3% of the students wanted

to create an original introduction, 10% wanted to increase the use of supporting details, 24% wanted to increase their grammatical skills, 38% wanted to improve their handwriting, 10% wanted to improve their editing skills, 3% didn't specify an improvement, and 7% gave responses that were unrelated to writing.

Probable Causes (Site Based)

A teacher writing survey (Appendix H) was given to 15 fourth and fifth grade teachers during the first week of school. It was used to evaluate training, strategies used, and time spent in teaching writing. The results of the survey indicated that 40 % of the staff was formally trained in writing prior to becoming a teacher, while 60 % were not formally trained. These results support that the probable cause of lack of teacher training is evident at this site. This survey also revealed 83 % of the teachers at this site sometimes or frequently used the strategy of peer editing, 73 % of the teachers sometimes or frequently used conferencing, 74 % sometimes or frequently used student self reflections, and 100 % of the teachers sometimes or frequently used graphic organizers for writing. The final results of this survey indicated that 40 % of the teachers surveyed spent one hour per week on writing, 33 % spent two hours per week on writing, and 27 % spent three or more hours per week on writing.

Probable Causes (Literature Based)

A review of educational literature indicates a lack of writing ability among today's students and suggests several possible causes for this shortcoming. The overall portrait of writing achievement among American students in grades 4, 8, and 11 is alarming. The NAEP Writing Report Card reports:

> Most students, majority and minority alike, are unable to write adequately except in response to the simplest of tasks. Although writing performance improves from grade 4 to grade 8-and less dramatically from grade 8 to grade 11-even at grade 11, fewer than one-fourth of the students performed adequately on writing tasks involving skills required for success in academic studies, business, or the professions. In general, American students can write at a minimal level, but cannot express themselves well enough to ensure that their writing will accomplish the intended purpose (p.9).

Probable causes for these inadequacies include lack of teacher training and student motivation. According to Graves (1976), most elementary school teachers have not been prepared to teach writing. Courses in the teaching of writing are not available as revealed by a recent survey of education courses at 36 universities. The survey showed that 169 courses were offered in reading, 30 in children's literature, 21 in language arts, and only two in the teaching of writing. Graves goes on to suggest that teachers do not teach a subject in which they feel unprepared, even when a subject such as writing is mandated by the school curriculum.

According to Neill (1982), neither elementary or secondary teachers including English majors have been prepared to teach writing. Teacher certification requirements

similarly neglect writing. Graves (1976) suggests there is an imbalance between reading and writing requirements for teacher certification. Most states require one course in teaching reading, many require two, and some are attempting to raise the requirement to three. However, no comparable requirements relating to the teaching of writing is felt necessary.

Applebee of Stanford University informed federal officials in Washington D.C., "Much of the writing problem stems from the failure to give writing a systematic place in the school curriculum (as cited in Neill, 1982, p.12). The NAEP writing research concurs that 47% of fourth graders, 38% of eighth graders, and 37% of eleventh graders noted writing two or fewer reports or essays over a six week period. This averages out to less than one writing assignment every three weeks. According to Neill (1982) it is not surprising that teachers de-emphasize writing in their classrooms or stick to drill and multiple choice tests due to the admittance of teachers' lack of comfort in teaching writing.

Studies indicate teachers assign writing yet lack the training to teach students how to write which directly impacts the students motivation to write. NAEP Writing Report Card (1986) illustrates as students move from grade four to grade eleven, attitudes toward writing deteriorate. Fifty-seven percent of fourth graders reported they like to write a majority of the time, however by eleventh grade this decreases to 39%. According to Turbill (1982), teachers are continually searching for exciting writing topics for students on account of a belief that motivation occurs from the teacher chosen topics. The opposite of what teachers believe their role in motivating student writers was proven invalid after 27 teachers participated in the Saint George Writing Project. The Project

concluded that when children write on topics they care about they quickly develop as writers. Calkins (1983) concurs when children chose their own topics they become invested in writing, use details, and write with specific concrete information. Haley-James (as cited in Neill, 1982) reviewed all professional literature on writing in the United States between 1900 and 1980 and discovered authorities agree that when children feel a need or a desire to write for a specific purpose or audience they write more effectively (p.41).

In conclusion, literature provides evidence that children are at a disadvantage due to the lack of teacher training in the area of writing. This lack of knowledge of writing provokes teachers to utilize ineffective strategies to motivate their writers.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Literature regarding the need for improving writing skills unveiled a variety of possible solutions. One of the current trends to teach writing is the Writer's Workshop approach. In a Writer's Workshop approach, Samway (1992) believes "Students are responsible for their own writing as well as helping each other grow as writers"(p. 11). According to Atwell (1998), Writer's Workshop consists of four key components: mini-lessons, frequent writing time, conferencing, and self evaluation. Zemelman (1998) concurs that an effective writing program utilizes the components of a Writer's Workshop. Other elements found to be successful in an effective writing program include: writing for a real purpose, writing for an audience, writing in all areas of the curriculum, learning grammar and mechanics in the context of actual writing, and learning the complete writing process.

Calkins (1986) identifies instruction in the writing process to be a major factor of any writing program. Linden (1990) outlines the four steps of the writing process. The first step includes pre-writing, where the students think about the paper, get ideas, make notes, and decide how to start. Writing a first draft is the second step. In the third step, students revise their work, looking for ways to improve their first draft. The final step is

writing a final draft. Researchers Carl Bereiter and Marlene Scarmadalia (as sited in Bennett, 1986) confirm, "It is essential that children understand, that writing is more than the disgorging of information; it is the reorganization and transmission of knowledge through revision, editing, and rewriting" (p.25).

Researchers find that students have difficulty generating their own ideas. Graves (as sited in Calkins, 1983) states, "Children who are fed topics, story starters, lead sentences...as a steady diet...rightfully panic when topics have to come from them" (p.25). Graphic organizers help students overcome the inability to brainstorm topics on their own. Graphic organizers provide a concrete picture of abstract ideas allowing students the opportunity to elaborate on their ideas. Forgarty and Bellanca (1991) suggest the use of graphic organizers to help students visualize, organize, and incorporate prior knowledge to be applied in writing situations. According to Rico (1983) an effective prewriting activity is semantic mapping or "clustering". "Clustering" is a nonlinear brainstorming processes related to free word association. Through clustering, writers spontaneously come up with a variety of ideas from their experiences stored inside their mind. Rico (1983) goes on to say, "Clustering acknowledges that it is okay to start writing not knowing exactly what, where, who, when, and how" (p.29). Whitehead (1998) suggests the use of graphic frames to help students organize information. Typically these frames organize information in one of the following structures: compare and contrast, problem – solution, cause and effect, and concept lists. Each of these structures leads to its own ways of thinking.

Lytle and Botel (as sited in Pappas, 1990) ascertain for children to become better writers, they need many opportunities to write a range of meaningful authentic texts

rather than being kept busy with isolated assigned exercises to "practice writing" that are found in many traditional classrooms (p. 178). Golden (1980) strongly agrees that children will develop an awareness of writing as a natural process for communication when writing comes from real experiences instead of writing from story starters or assigned topics. Calkins (1983) confirms that when children write about what they know and care about, they learn to write using specific information with details and to write with personality, point of view, and emotion.

Writer's Workshop

Mini-lessons/Modeling

Graves (1995) defines mini-lessons as a five to ten minute writing instruction which focuses on one particular writing convention. Teachers select when and what is to be covered in the mini-lesson based on their impressions of what the class needs as well as the needs of certain students. At times, whole class lessons are needed and at other times students who require a more focused instruction receive the lesson. Possible mini-lessons to be covered during a Writer's Workshop may include the colon, the period, the comma, first paragraphs, organization, endings, dialogue, use of verbs, use of nouns, use of adjectives, sentence combining, use of capitals, and possessives. Graves believes that giving ten minute mini-lessons once a week that focus on one convention teachers can help students expand their repertoire. During mini-lessons, Rosen (1987) feels students can share problems, ask specific questions from their own writing, and get help from the shared knowledge of the entire class. Teaching skills through mini-lessons produces better writing results than teaching isolated skills. Calkins (1986) concurs that mini-

lessons give students tips that can help them write effectively. When teachers emphasize limiting the topic, the quality of the student's writing improves dramatically.

The qualities of good writing can also be learned by modeling. According to Rico (1983) the purpose of modeling is to provide the writer with a structure and pattern to follow. Modeling relieves the writer of the anxiety of having to think of everything at once. Whitehead (1998) believes through writing and modeling, the teacher can provide the students with good examples of what well written pieces look like.

Frequent Writing

Rico (1983) believes that a specific time of day should be set aside for writing in order for it to become a habit. Calkins (1986) concurs with Rico that a writing time should be scheduled regularly so that students can anticipate writing. Calkins states, "If children know that every morning will begin with an hour for writing, or that Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday afternoons will be for writing, then they come to school ready to write" (p. 25). Another important reason for a regularly scheduled writing time is to allow children to take control of their own writing. Children can develop strategies and plan their writing when they know the boundaries within the Writer's Workshop. Graves (as sited in Calkins, 1986) states, "Children will 'write' when they are not writing if writing becomes a regular and frequent part of their lives" (p. 25). Frequent writing at a specified time is part of the Writer's Workshop strategy.

Peer Editing

Experts believe that it is important for a student to receive a different perspective on their writing. Therefore it is essential to allow ample time for students to be engaged in peer editing. Hillerich (1985) strongly believes, "...teachers should not play editor

[Teachers] don't need the practice, and students don't learn anything from the [teacher's] red pencil except a dislike for writing" (p.205). Rosen (1987) reports, "Students always say it is much easier to correct someone else's work than it is to identify errors in their own work. However, students don't know how to proofread effectively" (p.65-66). Research suggests teacher modeling and practice as a successful method to teach the peer editing process.

Calkins (1986) states, "The best way to extend peer editing is by participating in them: listening, modeling, and gently guiding" (p.132). Temple (1982) suggests a way to develop a classroom environment that promotes feelings of mutual trust and cooperation to make the peer editing process successful. The first step in the process is to model what is expected from the students during peer editing. The second step is to provide whole class instruction focusing on a specific skill using a student writing sample. The third step is to provide cooperative group practice which allows students to look for correct and incorrect usage of the skill modeled. The final step is allowing students to peer edit with one another.

Dupuis (1989) concurs with the steps of peer editing suggested by Temple, however he recommends the use of an editing checklist to help students learn to evaluate their work and the work of their peers. Prior to editing with a peer, Dupuis believes students should self-edit their work using an editing checklist. Following self-editing, students should exchange papers and use their checklist to edit each others writing.

Self Evaluation

Feedback on writing should be reflected by as many different people as possible, by peers, teachers, students of other ages, and the writer themselves as stated by Moffett (1992). Burke (1999) emphasizes that students need to self reflect so they can become able to monitor, assess, and improve their own performances and thinking. Moffett (1992) goes on to say that students may find it valuable to reflect on responses they've received from others, consider how they themselves feel about what they have written, and take responsibility of their own writing progress. Journal entries can aid students in reflecting on their writing and are useful during conferencing. Incorporating journal entries in conferencing allows the teacher to obtain a clearer picture of what is important to the writer. Self evaluation in writing is an integral part of the Writer's Workshop.

Conferencing in Writing

Adequate time for conferencing in Writer's Workshop is essential for student writing development. Graves (1994) emphasizes the main purpose of a conference is to encourage students to show what they know and to gain a clearer picture of where their writing is headed. In Dynamics of the Writing Conference, theorists have identified two advantages to utilizing writing conferences: (1) the student controls the direction of the learning and (2) the focus is on the student's writing skills (p.4). The Saint George (Australia) Writing Project (1982) found that using a conference approach enabled students to take control and responsibility for their writing. Teachers involved in this writing project concurred with theorists that conferencing is the key to the teaching/learning aspect. The teachers became more aware of the strengths and

weaknesses of individual children and of the progress each child made. These teachers believe conferencing is the means of truly individualizing learning.

Graves (1983) states that conferences stimulate children because the children do the work. Children teach, solve problems, answer impossible questions, or discover new information during conferences. Conferences also allow teachers to gain more information about the subject and acquire perspectives on what will help the child.

Williams (1996) believes that the single most effective tool to a Writer's Workshop is conferencing. Conferences could be individual or with a group as many as three with similar problems in their writing. When conferencing with students, Williams emphasizes two critical factors for success: (1) students have to do most of the talking, and (2) students need to work on two or less points at a time. Calkins (1986) advocates, "The underlying notion of the writing process is that students need to become critical readers of their own text. The job of a teacher in a writing conference is to put themselves out of a job, to interact with students in such a way that they learn how to interact with their own developing texts" (p.120). Barnes (1997) endorses that the use of effective conferencing, can turn a mediocre story into a masterpiece.

Writing Across the Content Area

Writing needs continuous practice. Incorporating writing across the curriculum provides students with the opportunity to develop their writing skills. Zemelman (1998) declares, "Writing is one of the best tools for learning any material because it activates thinking." (p.63). Hillerich (1985) recommends that writing across the curriculum has several purposes: (1) provides interesting and challenging materials, (2) increases learning of content area, (3) improves writing skills, and (4) promotes thinking skills.

Yates (1987) claims, "Students learn to write by writing, and there are a number of ways for teachers to promote more language activities to help students learn without becoming a writing specialist" (p.9). Yates suggests: (1) implementing thematic units to provide numerous language arts activities which expand students' interests and knowledge of the different disciplines, (2) assigning alternative assignments to allow students to find their own connection to course materials due to the fact that all students learn differently and have different interests, and (3) utilizing journals, reading notes, or learning logs to provide students the opportunity to describe and explore their own experiences. In addition, teachers can use journals to determine where extra help is needed, and to modify, or to amplify teaching materials.

The Illinois State Board of Education (1994) acknowledges the need for improving instruction in the areas of mechanics and organization. The state goal for writing declares, "As a result of their schooling, students will be able to write standard English in a grammatical, well-organized and coherent manner for a variety of purposes" (p.2). These skills can be addressed within the components of Writer's Workshop.

After reviewing the literature, Writer's Workshop would be a beneficial approach to improve students' writing skills. Students help each other to improve together. Students understand that the more help they give each other, the more help they will get in return. Moffett (1992) declares, "In learning to edit and perfect someone else's work, you learn to do so for your own, therefore Writer's Workshop epitomizes truly collaborative learning at its best" (p.202).

Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of increased instructional emphasis of writing processes, during the period of September 1999 to January 2000, the fourth and fifth grade students from the targeted classes will increase their writing skills in the areas of mechanics and organization, as measured by student writing samples evaluated by teacher checklists and student checklists, teacher developed rubrics, and teacher-student conferences.

In order to increase writing skills in the areas of mechanics and organization, the following processes are necessary:

1. Compile a list of instructional materials that foster writing skills in the areas of mechanics and organization.
    a. Analyze the list of instructional materials to determine which will be most effective in addressing the areas of mechanics and organization.
    b. Gather the most effective instructional materials that will foster writing skills in the areas of mechanics and organization.
    c. Adapt the instructional materials to meet the specific needs of each targeted classroom.
2. Develop a series of learning activities based upon researched proven strategies that address writing skills.
3. Construct mini-lessons that address the areas of mechanics and organization in writing.
4. Formulate teacher checklists and student checklists that assess writing skills in the areas of mechanics and organization.
5. Develop rubrics to assess student writing.

6. Formulate a student self-reflective form for the teacher to discuss with students during writing conference to assess students writing performance.
7. Develop pre-test writing prompts to assess the students' current writing skills in the areas of mechanics and organization.
8. Gather district developed writing assessments which will be administered as post-tests.
9. Analyze the results of the pre- and post-tests that were administered to assess students' writing skills in the areas of mechanics and organization.
10. Instruct students on how to select and analyze samples of their writing to use with student generated checklists.
11. Conduct teacher-student conferences to gather data on student's perspective of his or her writing in the areas of mechanics and organization.
12. Compare the results of teacher and student checklists.

Project Action Plan

This action plan is designed to guide the researchers in implementing a Writer's Workshop at the fourth and fifth grade levels. The researchers will make individual modifications as necessary to accommodate the site and its resources, the individual student needs, and the individual teaching situations.

July, 1999

Materials will be gathered and selected to be utilized for implementing the mini-lessons in the fall.

I. Plan writing curriculum targeting the areas of mechanics and organization.

A. Develop teacher writing samples to be used when addressing writing components during mini-lessons. Mini-lessons may include:

1. Capitalization
2. Punctuation
3. Spelling
4. Sentence Structure
5. Word Choice (verbs, adjectives, adverbs)
6. Transitional Words
7. Components of Narrative Writing
8. Components of Persuasive Writing

B. Compile, gather, and develop materials to assess writing in the areas of mechanics and organization.

1. Select pre and post writing prompts
   a. Narrative writing
   b. Persuasive writing
2. Develop teacher and student checklists for the areas of mechanics and organization
3. Develop rubrics to assess student writing
4. Develop reflection form for students to discuss their writing during individual teacher-student conferences

August, 1999

II. Preparing the environment of a writing classroom

A. Set up room to promote writing and sharing

1. Arrange classroom furniture
2. Provide area for small group conferencing
3. Provide an author's sharing area

B. Designate an area to store materials

1. Student writing portfolios which will act as a storage for student writing samples
2. Student journals
3. Student supply boxes
   a. Pencils with erasers
   b. Marking pens
4. Overhead projector and transparencies

C. Gather motivational and educational materials for display

1. Display posters defining and illustrating different types of writing
2. Display motivational posters

D. Gather a variety of writing samples to be read by students

1. Provide classroom library
2. Provide different sources of written media (i.e. magazines, newspapers)

E. Create student reference binder which will store implemented mini-lessons for students to refer to during Writing Worksh[illegible] time

August/September, 1999

The first week will be devoted to assessing the current writing levels of students in the areas of mechanics and organization. They will also become familiarized with the rules and routines of Writer's Workshop.

III. Collect data on the current writing levels of the students

A. Administer pretest writing prompts for the following types of writing:

1. Narrative writing

2. Persuasive writing

B. Conduct teacher-student conferencing of student writing performance using student reflection form

IV. Establish the procedures for the operation and management of Writer's Workshop

A. Introduce and explain procedures of Writer's Workshop

1. Conduct a mock mini lessons

2. Use of reference materials

3. Use and storage of portfolios

4. Model and practice peer editing

5. Role play teacher-student conferencing

C. Demonstrate how to self-edit writing

D. Model appropriate feedback to be used during large group sharing sessions on writing

E. Plan and teach a lesson on the writing process: brainstorming, first draft, editing, conferencing, revising, final draft, and publishing

Late September/December, 1999

The next twelve weeks will consist of implementing Writer's Workshop. During each Writer's Workshop a new targeted writing skill will be taught and practiced. Each mini-lesson will be student driven by the needs of the class.

V. Implementation of Writer's Workshop

A. Conduct writing workshop 2 to 3 days a week

B. Model a specific component of writing using an example of the teacher's writing

C. Students select an example of their writing from their writing portfolio to peer edit

D. Edit peer's writing for specific component

E. Analyze class errors found during peer editing session

F. Teach mini-lesson based on results from class analysis

G. Provide 30 to 40 minutes of writing time allowing students flexibility to work at their own pace in the writing process. Options may include:

1. Writing about a teacher chosen topic
2. Create writing from a student chosen topic
3. Self edit for mechanics and organization
4. Peer edit using student checklists
5. Conference with teacher to evaluate progress
6. Revise writing
7. Publish writing

Week One through Six of Instruction

For the next six weeks, Writer's Workshop will focus on narrative writing. In conjunction with narrative writing, lessons will be conducted focusing on capitalization, punctuation, sentence structure, transitional words, and verbs.

Week Seven through Twelfth of Instruction

For the next six weeks, Writer's Workshop will focus on persuasive writing. In conjunction with persuasive writing, lessons will be conducted focusing on adjectives, adverbs, spelling, and review previous components as necessary.

December, 1999

The last week of school before winter break, will be devoted to reassessing the current writing levels of the students in the areas of mechanics and organization.

VI. Collect data on the current writing levels of the students

A. Administer posttest writing prompts for the following types of writing:

1. Narrative writing

2. Persuasive writing

B. Conduct teacher-student conferencing of student writing performance using student reflection form

January, 2000

The first week after winter break, will be devoted to celebrating the accomplishments of our published writers.

VII. Author's Open House

A. Display student selected published writing in the following locations:

1. Classroom

2. Hallways

3. Media Center

B. Invite parents, administrators, and peers to attend author's open house

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of the intervention, evidence of specific writing skills in the areas of mechanics and organization will be evaluated within the context of student writing samples. These samples will be derived from student's writing as a result of prompts provided by the teacher (Appendixes D, E, F, and G). In addition, teacher evaluation and student self evaluation checklists will be created. Scoring rubrics will be developed, and conferencing with students will be held as part of the assessment process.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Interventions

The objective of this project was to increase students' writing skills in the areas of mechanics and organization. The implementation of a Writer's Workshop was selected to effect the desired changes.

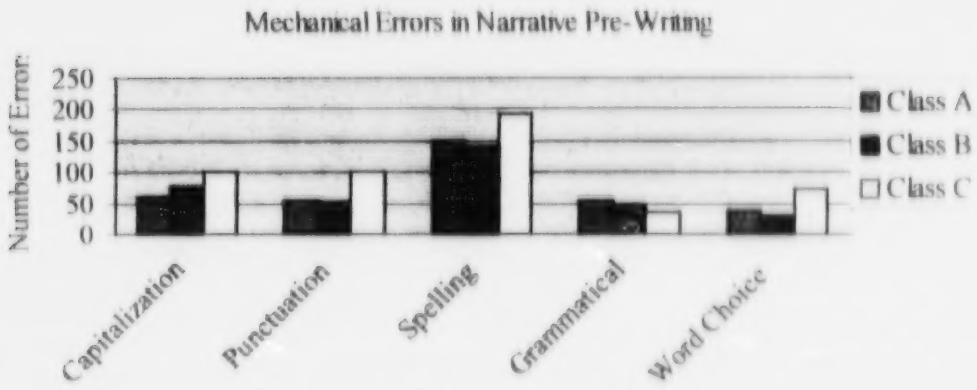
The researchers surveyed 15 certified staff members during the first week of the 1999 school year to evaluate teacher training, strategies used, and time spent teaching writing (Appendix H). Pretest writing prompts for narrative and persuasive writing (Appendixes C and D) were administered to the students during the first week of school. Students then engaged in reflective thinking about their writing (Appendix G). The researchers' original plans called for implementing a 12 week Writer's Workshop for 30 to 40 minutes per session two to three days a week. Each researcher increased the amount of time to 60 minutes per session to meet the needs of all students. The researchers also needed to increase the length of the implementation period by four weeks due to scheduling difficulties and student non-attendance days. During the last week of January, post writing prompts for narrative and persuasive writing were administered. Students then wrote a final reflection on their writing.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to assess the effects of a Writer's Workshop on the mechanics and organization of writing, three tools were utilized to document strengthens and weaknesses of student writing. A writing checklist documented deficits and improvements of targeted mechanical and organizational skills. Teacher developed rubrics evaluated student writing and separated writing results into three categories: exceeds, meets, and does not meet. Self reflections gave students an opportunity to internalize their writing.

The post test writing prompts for narrative and persuasive writing (Appendixes I and J) were administered during the last week of January. The results were tallied using the writing checklists. The mechanical checklist identified errors in the areas of capitalization, punctuation, spelling, grammar, and word choice.

Figure 5 shows a comparison of the results of the mechanical checklist error tallies for the narrative pre-writing and post-writing prompts. Class A post-test results revealed 37 capitalization errors, 33 punctuation errors, 129 spelling errors, 37 grammatical errors, and 23 word choice errors. Class A results revealed a decrease in errors in all areas of mechanics. The most notable decrease seems to be in the area of grammar. Class B post-test results revealed 115 capitalization errors, 30 punctuation errors, 259 spelling errors, 131 grammatical errors, and 53 word choice errors. Class B exhibited an increase in errors in all areas of mechanics except for punctuation. The most notable increase seems to be in the area of spelling. Class C post-test results revealed 39 capitalization errors, 65 punctuation errors, 199 spelling errors, 9 grammatical errors, and 38 word choice errors. Class C exposed a decrease in all areas of mechanics except for spelling. The most notable decrease seems to be in the area of capitalization.



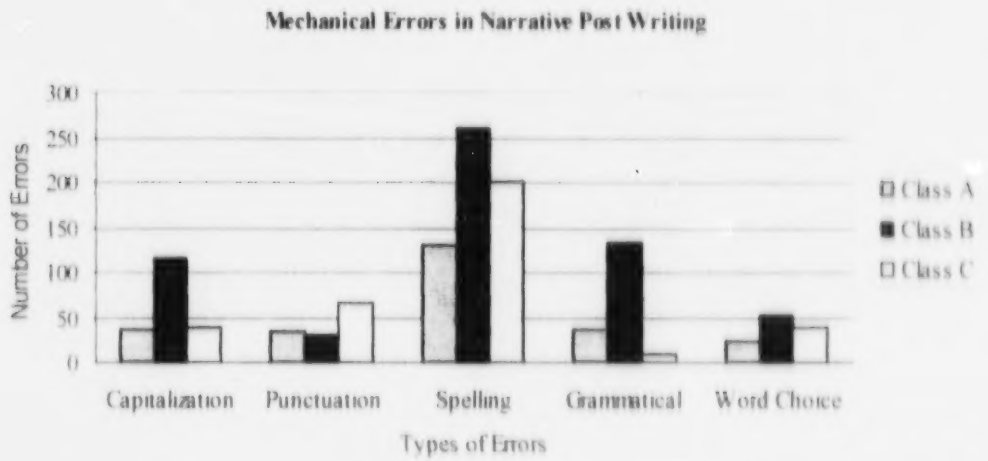
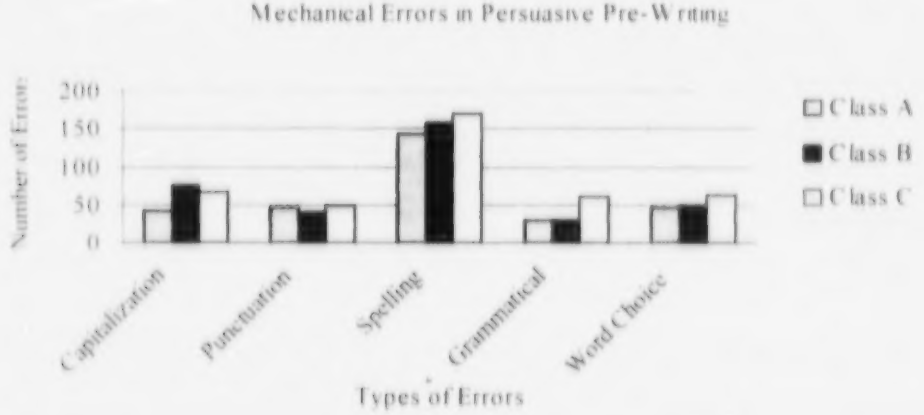


Figure 5. Types and number of student mechanical errors tallied from the narrative pre-writing and post-writing prompts for the targeted classes during the first semester of the 1999-2000 school year.

Figure 6 shows a comparison of the results of the mechanical checklist error tallies for the persuasive pre-writing and post-writing prompts. Class A post-test results revealed 27 capitalization errors, 26 punctuation errors, 127 spelling errors, 17 grammatical errors, and 28 word choice errors. Class A results revealed a decrease in

errors in all areas of mechanics. The most notable decrease seems to be in the area of punctuation. Class B post-test results revealed 62 capitalization errors, 11 punctuation errors, 215 spelling errors, 57 grammatical errors, and 52 word choice errors. Class B exhibited an increase in errors in all areas of mechanics except for capitalization and punctuation. The most notable decrease seems to be in the area of punctuation. Class C post-test results revealed 36 capitalization errors, 82 punctuation errors, 168 spelling errors, 10 grammatical errors, and 51 word choice errors. Class C exposed a decrease in all areas of mechanics except for punctuation. The most notable decrease seems to be in the area of grammar.



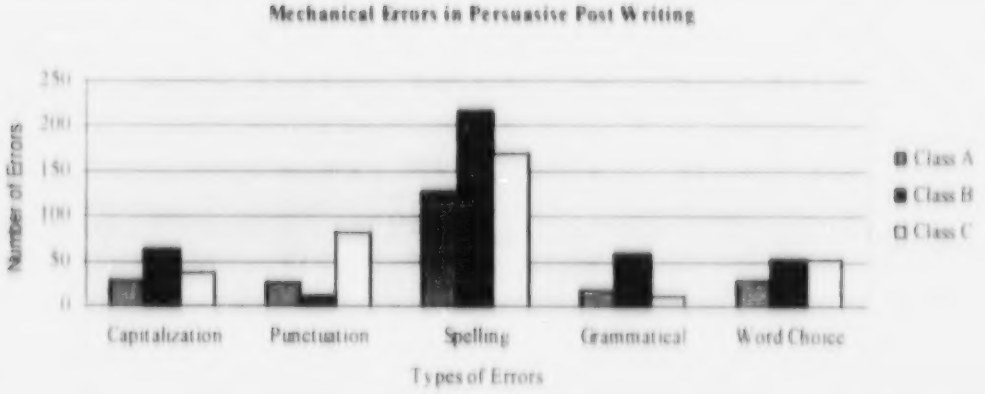


Figure 6. Types and number of student mechanical errors tallied from the persuasive pre-writing and post-writing prompts for the targeted classes during the first semester of the 1999-2000 school year.

Figure 7 shows a comparison of the results of the use or non-use of organizational skills for the narrative pre-writing and post-writing prompts. In Class A's post-test all 29 students included an introduction. Twenty-six students supported their writing with details. Transitional words were used by 23 students. Twenty-one students included a conclusion and eight students had no written conclusion. Twenty-three students indented paragraphs in their writing, whereas six students did not. In Class B's post-test all 29 students included an introduction. Twenty-six students supported their writing with details. Transitional words were used by 29 students. Twenty-eight students included a conclusion and one student had no written conclusion. All twenty-nine students indented paragraphs in their writing. In Class C's post-test 27 students included an introduction and two students had no written introduction. Twenty-six students supported their writing with details. Transitional words were used by 23 students. Twenty-three students included a conclusion and five students had no written conclusion. Twenty-six students indented paragraphs in their writing, whereas two students did not. Class A, Class B, and Class C results seem to show an increase in the use of introductions, supporting details, transitions, conclusions, and indenting of paragraphs.

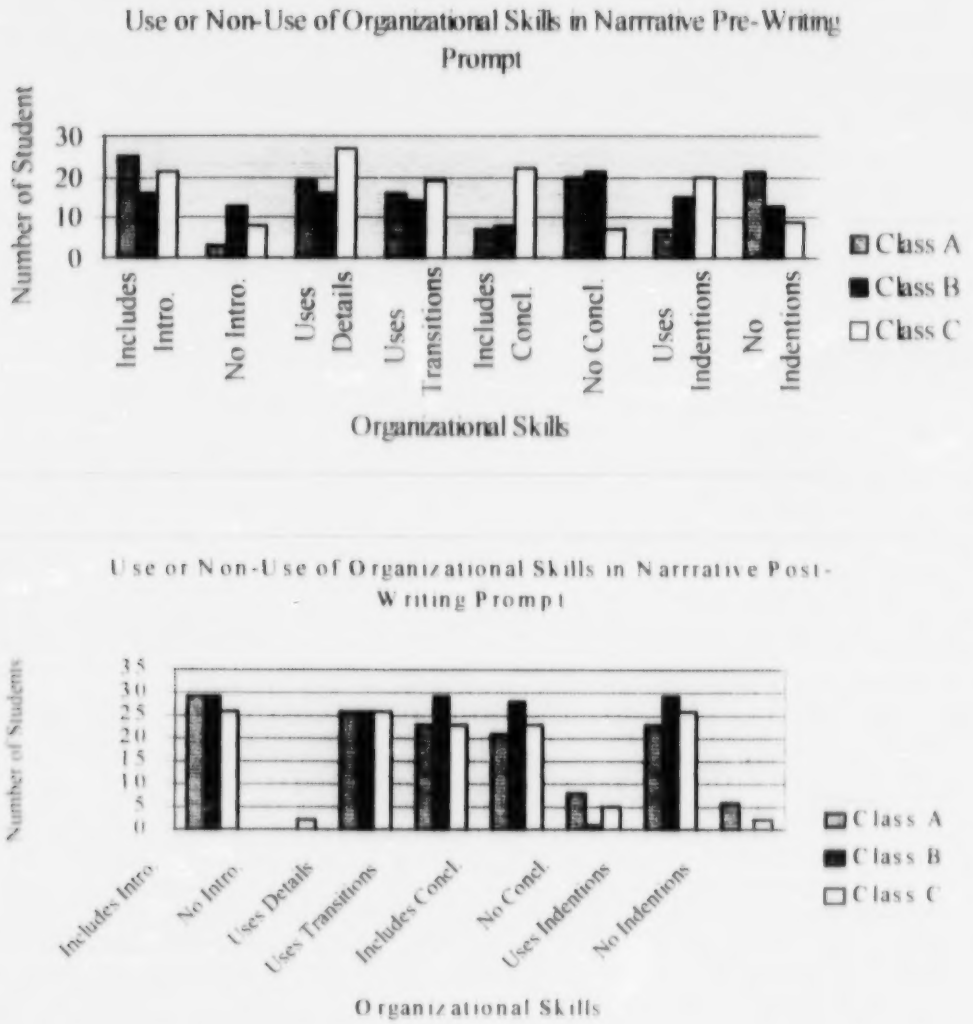
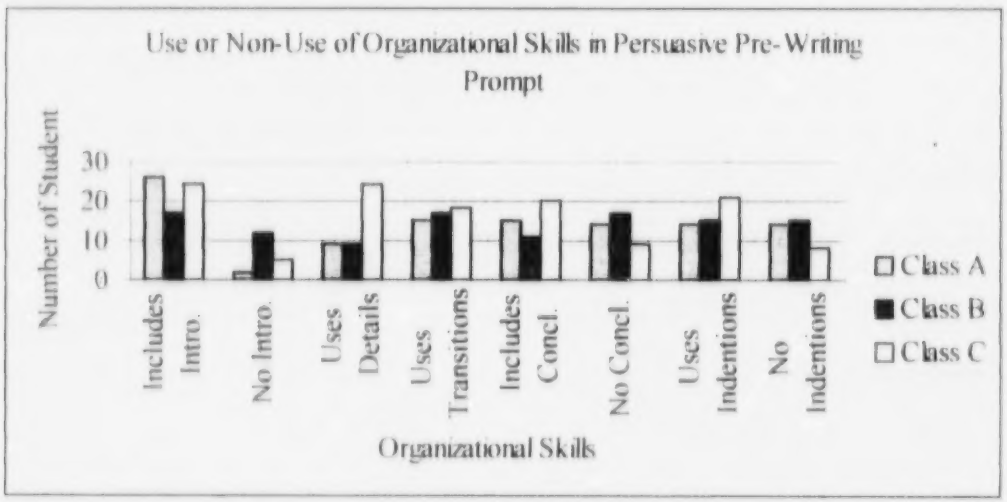


Figure 7. The use and non-use of organizational skills from the narrative pre-writing and post-writing prompts for the targeted classes during the first semester of the 1999-2000 school year.

Figure 8 depicts a comparison of the results of the use or non-use of organizational skills for the persuasive pre-writing and post-writing prompts. In Class A's post-test all 29 students included an introduction. Twenty-seven students supported their

writing with details. Transitional words were used by 23 students. Twenty-four students included a conclusion and five students had no written conclusion. Twenty-four students indented paragraphs in their writing, whereas five students did not. In Class B's post-test all 29 students included an introduction. Twenty-five students supported their writing with details. Transitional words were used by 29 students. All twenty-nine students included a conclusion. All twenty-nine students indented paragraphs in their writing. In Class C's post-test 27 students included an introduction and one student had no written introduction. Twenty-four students supported their writing with details. Transitional words were used by 27 students. All twenty-eight students included a conclusion. All twenty-eight students indented paragraphs in their writing. Class A, Class B, and Class C results seem to show an increase in the use of introductions, supporting details, transitions, conclusions, and indenting of paragraphs.



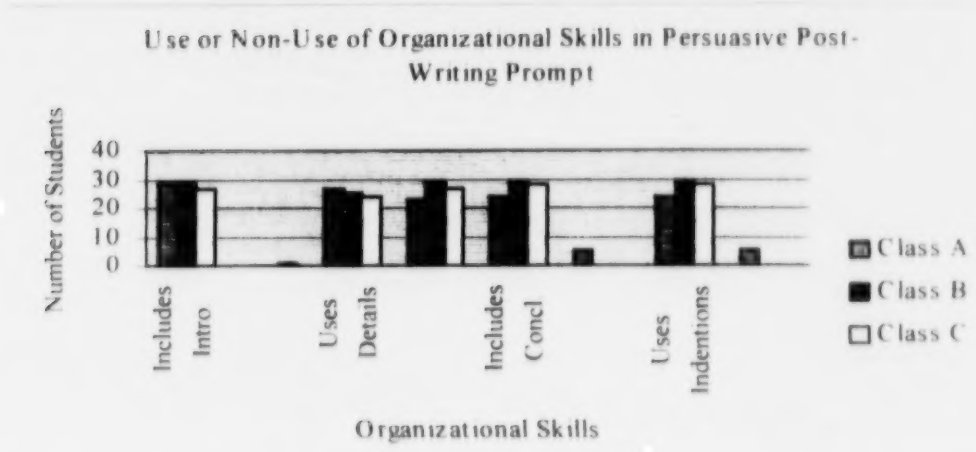


Figure 8. The use and non-use of organizational skills from the persuasive pre-writing and post-writing prompts for the targeted classes during the first semester of the 1999-2000 school year.

Writing skills were also assessed through writing rubrics (Appendixes E and F). Table 3 compares the results of the number of students scoring within each of the three categories, Exceeds (E), Meets (M), and Does Not Meet (DNM), on the narrative pre-writing prompt and the narrative post-writing prompt. In Class A's post-test two students fell within the exceeds category, 26 students met, and one student did not meet. In comparison to the pre-test, the post-test results showed that Class A students' scores increased in both the exceeds and the meets categories. Class A results also showed a decrease in the number of students' scoring in the does not meet category. In Class B's post-test one student fell within the exceeds category, 27 students met, and one student did not meet. In comparison to the pre-test, the post-test results showed that Class B students' scores increased in both the exceeds and the meets categories. Class B results

also showed a large decrease in the number of students' scoring in the does not meet category. In Class C's post-test two students fell within the exceeds category, 26 students met, and zero students did not meet. In comparison to the pre-test, the post-test results showed that Class C students' scores increased in both the exceeds and the meets categories. Class C results also showed a decrease in the number of students' scoring in the does not meet category.

Table 3

Narrative Writing Rubric Results for Pre-Writing and Post-Writing Prompts

Category	Class A		Class B		Class C	
	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Exceeds	0	2	0	1	0	2
Meets	24	26	17	27	21	26
Does Not Meet	5	1	12	1	8	0

Table 4 compares the results of the number of students scoring within each of the three categories, Exceeds (E), Meets (M), and Does Not Meet (DNM), on the persuasive pre-writing prompt and the persuasive post-writing prompt. In Class A's post-test three students fell within the exceeds category, 26 students met, and zero students did not meet. In comparison to the pre-test, the post-test results showed that Class A students' scores increased in both the exceeds and the meets categories. Class A results also showed a decrease in the number of students' scoring in the does not meet category. In Class B's post-test one student fell within the exceeds category, 28 students met, and zero students did not meet. In comparison to the pre-test, the post-test results showed that Class B students' scores increased in both the exceeds and the meets categories. Class B results

also showed a large decrease in the number of students' scoring in the does not meet category. In Class C's post-test two students fell within the exceeds category, 26 students met, and zero students did not meet. In comparison to the pre-test, the post-test results showed that Class C students' scores increased in both the exceeds and the meets categories. Class C results also showed a decrease in the number of students' scoring in the does not meet category.

Table 4

Persuasive Writing Rubric Results for Pre-Writing and Post-Writing Prompts

Category	Class A		Class B		Class C	
	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Exceeds	0	3	0	1	0	2
Meets	19	26	11	28	21	26
Does Not Meet	9	0	19	0	8	0

Students engaged in reflective thinking about their writing following the twelve week study. (Appendix G). Students were asked to internalize their writing experience through completing a self-reflection following the narrative and persuasive writing prompts. Students' responses were placed into two main categories: an area of writing that students felt comfortable with and an area where students felt there was a need for improvement.

In Class A, following the post-test, 96% of the students felt internally satisfied with their writing, and 4% were internally dissatisfied. Whereas, following the pre-test, 54% of the students felt internally satisfied with their writing, and 46% felt pleased with only one component of their writing. In Class B, following the post-test, 79% of the

students felt internally satisfied with their writing, 14% were internally dissatisfied, and 7% were internally undecided. Whereas, following the pre-test, 55% of the students were internally satisfied with their writing, 7% were internally dissatisfied, and 38% of the students gave responses that were unrelated to writing. In Class C, following the post-test, 86% of the students were internally satisfied with their writing, and 14% were internally dissatisfied. Whereas, following the pre-test, 38% were internally satisfied, 24% were internally dissatisfied, and 23% gave responses that were unrelated to writing.

Student responses regarding their feelings towards improving their writing skills after the post-testing varied form the pre-testing responses. In Class A, following the post-test, 51% of the students felt they needed to improve on their spelling, 17% felt they wanted to improve their handwriting, 24% wanted to increase the use of supporting details, 6% felt they needed to include transitional words, and 28% wanted to improve conclusions in their writing. Results from the post-test indicate that students found a greater need to improve spelling and include supporting details, while they felt less compelled to improve their handwriting. After the post-test, students felt they no longer needed to improve on the writing topic, however they felt a need to improve the use of transitional words and conclusions. In Class B, following the post-test, 7% of the students found a need to improve their overall writing, 4% wanted to improve handwriting, 61% wanted to work on grammatical error, 21% wanted to increase the use of supporting details, 4% didn't specify the improvement they needed, and 4% wanted to improve introductions in their writing. Results from the post-test indicate that students found a greater need to improve grammatical errors, introductions, and the use of supporting details, while they felt less compelled to improve their handwriting. In Class

C, following the post-test, 20% of the students wanted to add more details and colorful language to their writing, 27% wanted to improve spelling, 23% felt a need to improve their grammatical errors, 15% felt a need to improve handwriting, 11% wanted to improve their overall writing, and 4% gave an unrelated responses to writing. Results from the post-test indicate that students found a greater need to improve the use of supporting details in their writing, while they felt less compelled to improve their handwriting.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the analysis of the data on Writer's Workshop, the majority of the targeted students showed an improvement in their writing ability. The students exhibited growth in the writing areas of mechanics and organization.

The targeted fourth and fifth grade students preformed at varying levels of ability within each classroom. The researchers feel the intervention of a Writer's Workshop was successful in all targeted classrooms.

The researchers feel the success of the intervention was due in part to an organized environment that fostered writing. By establishing a consistent routine, many students looked forward to Writer's Workshop time. Many targeted students also chose to work on their writing during free time and even took pieces home to finish the publishing process by transferring their writing onto their computers.

Time constraints and scheduling needed to be adjusted to allow ample time in the classroom for students to creatively express themselves in written form. The editing and conferencing components of Writer's Workshop were time consuming, however extremely beneficial to the overall improvement of the students' writing. A filing system

was useful in storing students' writing during the drafting, revising, editing, and publishing phases.

Mini-lessons allowed the researchers to use a student directed approach to writing rather than the mundane use of the grade level language text book. Student writing skill needs were identified and modeled by the researchers through examples of both the students' and researchers' writing. Writing skills improved throughout the targeted classrooms.

Overall, the researchers and the targeted students were pleased with the outcome of the intervention of Writer's Workshop. Writer's Workshop will continue to be integral part of the language arts program in all three targeted classrooms next year with modifications. To see more effective results and decrease the time constraint of the editing and conferencing components of a Writer's Workshop, teacher assistants or volunteers are recommended. The researchers also suggest the use of colored pencils to differentiate between the writer's self editing marks and those of the peer editors' and the teacher's. The researchers feel that a Writer's Workshop was an advantageous endeavor for the targeted fourth and fifth grade students as well as the researchers themselves.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A
Mechanical Checklist

Writing Prompts	1	2	3	4	5
Incorrect Capitalization:					
I					
Beginning of sentences					
Names of People					
Names of Places					
Names of Titles					
Addresses					
Greetings of a letter					
Closing of a letter					
Misused Capitals					
Incorrect Punctuation:					
Periods					
Question Marks					
Exclamation Marks					
Commas					
Quotation Marks					
Incorrect Spelling:					
Commom Words					
Plurals					
Endings (-ed, -ing, -tion)					
Homonyms					
Apostrophes					
Incorrect Grammar:					
Subject-Verb Agreements					
Pronoun Usage					
Run-on Sentences					
Incomplete Sentences					
Word Choice:					
Too many so, to, it, and					
Missing words					
Strong Verbs					
Strong Adjective					
Strong Adverbs					
Wrong word used					

Appendix B
Organizational Checkilst

Writing Prompts	1	2	3	4	5
Introduction:					
Orginal Introduction					
Simple Introduction					
Introduction Missing					
Sentence Structure:					
Complete Sentences					
Incomplete Sentences					
Sequential Order					
Supporting Details					
Unnecessary Information					
Transitions:					
Beginning Paragraphs					
Within Paragraphs					
No Transitions					
Conclusion:					
Restates Introduction					
Conclusion Missing					

Appendix C
Fourth and Fifth Grade Narrative Pretest Writing Prompts

Fourth Grade Narrative Writing Pretest

DIRECTIONS: Teacher says: Today you will be given 60 minutes to write a narrative essay about you. Teacher reads the following prompt. Students may not use any type of spelling tool during the writing period.

Narrative – All About Me

You just started a new journey through fourth grade with a wonderful teacher. In order for your new teacher to get to know you, she would like to know all about you. Before you begin to write think about your family, friends, interests, hobbies, and interesting facts that you could include in your narrative.

Fifth Grade Narrative Writing Pretest

DIRECTIONS: Teacher says: Today you will be given 60 minutes to write a narrative essay about you. Teacher reads the following prompt. Students may not use any type of spelling tool during the writing period.

Narrative – All About Me

You just started a new journey through fifth grade with a wonderful teacher. In order for your new teacher to get to know you, she would like to know all about you. Be sure to include as many details about you.

Appendix D
Fourth and Fifth Grade Persuasive Pretest Writing Prompts

Fourth Grade Persuasive Writing Pretest

DIRECTIONS: Teacher says: Today you will be given 60 minutes to write a persuasive essay on staying up late. Teacher reads the following prompt. Students may not use any type of spelling tool during the writing period.

Persuasive – Can I Stay Up Late?

How many times have you wanted to stay up late to watch a special television program but were told to go to bed? Write an essay to convince your parents to allow you to stay up and watch the program. Give reasons to support your position.

Fifth Grade Persuasive Writing Pretest

DIRECTIONS: Teacher says: Today you will be given 60 minutes to write a persuasive essay on the best animal. Teacher reads the following prompt. Students may not use any type of spelling tool during the writing period.

Persuasive – Best Animal of the Year

A new award for the Best Animal of the Year has been announced. Think which animal you would nominate to win the award. Write an essay stating your choice and give reasons to support your position.

Appendix E
Fourth and Fifth Grade Narrative Rubric

Student Name _____ Grade ___ Date _____

Well Developed (4)	Developed (3)	Developing (2)	Attempted (1)
Style and Language			
___ Original introduction Good variety and balance of sentence structure, uses many strong verbs, adjectives adverbs. Appropriate use of dialogue and sensory details. Uses rhetorical devices such as similes and metaphors, humor may be evident, Author's style and voice is present.	___ Attempts original introduction, some adjectives, strong verbs, and adverbs. Attempts distinctive style through word choice and sentence construction.	___ Few adjectives and strong verbs, and many overused words. Uses simple sentences.	___ Incorrect sentence structure and improper use of adjectives and strong verbs. Insufficient writing to tell.
Focus			
___ Event Reaction Evaluation	___ Event Reaction	___ Event	___ Insufficient writing to tell.
Support			
___ Five sentences per body paragraph.	___ Four sentences per body paragraph.	___ Three sentences per body paragraph	___ Two sentences per body paragraph.
Organization			
___ Introduction Conclusion Transitions begin par. Transitions within par.	___ Introduction Conclusion Transitions begin par.	___ Introduction Conclusion No transitions	___ Introduction or conclusion missing.
Conventions			
___ 0-3 errors on familiar spelling, punctuation, and usage concepts.	___ 4 errors on familiar spelling, puctuatation and usage concepts.	___ 5-6 errors on familiar spelling, punctuation, and usage concepts.	___ More than 6 errors on familiar spelling, punctuation, and usage concepts.

Total Writing Points _____

Writing Performance Category ( )

Exceeds	Meets	Does Not Meet
20-18	17-8	7-0
_____	_____	_____

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Appendix F
Fourth and Fifth Grade Persuasive Rubric

Student Name _____ Grade ___ Date _____

	Well Developed (4)	Developed (3)	Developing (2)	Attempted (1)
Style and Language	___ Original introduction Good variety and balance of sentence structure, uses many strong verbs, adjectives adverbs. Appropriate use of dialogue and sensory details. Uses rhetorical devices such as similes and metaphors, humor may be evident, Author's style and voice is present.	___ Attempts original introduction, some adjectives, strong verbs, and adverbs. Attempts distinctive style through word choice and sentence construction.	___ Few adjectives and strong verbs, and many overused words. Uses simple sentences.	___ Incorrect sentence structure and improper use of adjectives and strong verbs. Insufficient writing to tell.
Focus	___ Opinion Preview sentence Evaluation	___ Opinion Preview sentence	___ Opinion General preview	___ No opinion No preview
Support	___ Five sentences per body paragraph.	___ Four sentences per body paragraph.	___ Three sentences per body paragraph	___ Two sentences per body paragraph.
Organization	___ Introduction Conclusion Transitions begin par. Transitions within par.	___ Introduction Conclusion Transitions begin par.	___ Introduction Conclusion No transitions	___ Introduction or conclusion missing.
Conventions	___ 0-3 errors on familiar spelling, punctuation, and usage concepts.	___ 4 errors on familiar spelling, puctuatation and usage concepts.	___ 5-6 errors on familiar spelling, punctuation, and usage concepts.	___ More than 6 errors on familiar spelling, punctuation, and usage concepts.

Total Writing Points _____

Writing Performance Category ( )

Exceeds	Meets	Does Not Meet
20-18	17-8	7-0
_____	_____	_____

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Appendix G
Student Self Reflection

Self Writing Reflection

Name_____ Date_____

Title_____

1. When I look back at the work I have done, I feel _____

_____

because_____

_____

2. I have improved in _____

_____

_____

3. I am really proud of_____

_____

because_____

_____

4. Next time I write I will work on_____

_____

because_____

_____

Appendix H
Teacher Writing Survey

Writing Survey

Circle your response.

1. How much time do you devote to teaching writing skills?

   Less than one hour a week One hour a week

   Two hours a week Three or more hours a week

2. How much time do students spend on formal writing (i.e. narrative, expository, persuasive)?

   Less than one hour a week One hour a week

   Two hours a week Three or more hours a week

3. Do you wish you had more time to teach writing? Yes No

4. Did you have formal training in teaching writing prior to your first teaching experience? Yes No

5. Have you taken any additional training in the teaching of writing? Yes No

6. How often do you use the following strategies in your classroom?

   Peer-editing: Frequently Sometimes Rarely Never

   Conferencing: Frequently Sometimes Rarely Never

   Reflections: Frequently Sometimes Rarely Never

   Graphic Organizers: Frequently Sometimes Rarely Never

Appendix I
Fourth and Fifth Grade Narrative Posttest Writing Prompts

Fourth Grade Narrative Writing Posttest

DIRECTIONS: Teacher says: Today you will be given 60 minutes to write a narrative essay on a day in your life. Teacher reads the following prompt. Students may not use any type of spelling tool during the writing period.

Narrative – A Day in the Life of A Fourth Grader

Many adults long to return the days when they were a fourth grader. Write an essay about what a day in your life is really like. It could be a day when everything has gone right, it could be a day when everything has gone wrong, or it could be just an ordinary day (maybe even yesterday). Be sure to include your feeling about this day and many details about what has happened.

Fifth Grade Narrative Writing Posttest

DIRECTIONS: Teacher says: Today you will be given 60 minutes to write a narrative essay on a day in your life. Teacher reads the following prompt. Students may not use any type of spelling tool during the writing period.

Narrative – A Day in the Life of A Fifth Grader

Many adults long to return the days when they were a fifth grader. Write an essay about what a day in your life is really like. It could be a day when everything has gone right, it could be a day when everything has gone wrong, or it could be just an ordinary day (maybe even yesterday). Be sure to include many details about what has happened.

Appendix J
Fourth and Fifth Grade Persuasive Posttest Writing Prompts

Fourth Grade Persuasive Writing Posttest

DIRECTIONS: Teacher says: Today you will be given 60 minutes to write a persuasive essay on cutting or not cutting P.E. classes. Teacher reads the following prompt. Students may not use any type of spelling tool during the writing period.

Persuasive – Should Gym Classes Be Cut?

Each year school leaders look for ways to cut the amount of money spent in the schools. Some have suggested that one way to save money would be to cut all gym classes. These people feel that this would save the district money and give the students more time to study and learn. Write an essay stating your opinion on this subject and reasons to support your position.

Fifth Grade Persuasive Writing Posttest

DIRECTIONS: Teacher says: Today you will be given 60 minutes to write a persuasive essay on the best movie/television show. Teacher reads the following prompt. Students may not use any type of spelling tool during the writing period.

Persuasive – Best Movie Television Programs

Each year awards are given for the best movies and television shows. Think which movie or television show you would nominate to win an award. Write an essay stating your choice and give reasons to support your position.

Appendix K
Letter to Parents

Dear Parents,

As part of the requirements for my Master's Degree from Saint Xavier University, I am implementing new activities to improve your child's writing in my classroom. The purpose of these activities is to help your child refine his or her writing content, capitalization skills, and punctuation skills.

The new activities will take place over a 12 week period of time. The major focus will be on improving the mechanics and organization of your child's writing through the implementation of a Writer's Workshop. During Writer's Workshop time, your child will be involved in short instructional lessons, peer activities, conferencing, journaling, and various writing tasks.

Student participation in these activities will not detract with day to day schooling. The benefit to your child will be that he or she has gained the skills necessary to clearly communicate in written form.

Your child's privacy will be respected throughout the twelve weeks. Names are not reported and no information will be released to unauthorized personnel. There is no cost or compensation for participating in these activities.

Your consent is required for your child to participate in these new activities. Please sign and return the permission slip below. If you have any questions please call me at (630) 260-6135. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

_____ I give permission for _____ to participate in these new writing activities to improve his or her writing skills.

_____ I do not give permission for _____ to participate in these new writing activities to improve his or her writing skills.

_____
Parent's Signature